

**HOW DO EXEMPLARY PRINCIPALS MANAGE AND  
SUSTAIN CHANGE IN ORDER TO ENHANCE  
STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES?**

**Primary Principals' Sabbatical Leave Scheme**

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## INTRODUCTION

There has been a great deal of research relating to leadership and the management of change. There is also a great deal of current information on Inquiry Learning as a pedagogical model for schools to implement. School leaders play a pivotal role in the development of school-wide programmes. “Effective school leaders are key to large-scale sustainable education reform” (Fullan 2002). Therefore my research focused on developing some understanding of how principals and other leaders in a school develop and sustain the Inquiry Learning model within their schools.

Much discussion has already taken place in the New Zealand Educational Community about the ‘crowded curriculum’. The curriculum stock-take resulting in the revised curriculum, along with the Ministry of Education’s School Strategy, will now provided a platform from which schools can discuss the way forward regarding a more integrative and meaningful approach to the delivery of the curriculum. It is my belief that the use of Inquiry Learning as a tool will assist the delivery of a more integrated approach to the curriculum, which will in turn reflect the goals inherent in the Ministry of Education’s Schooling Strategy.

This study examines schools that are already providing an Inquiry Learning model, and the leadership styles that have been employed in order to develop such models. In the four case study schools, I focussed on what Principals believed about the role that they have played in the introduction and sustainability of Inquiry Learning and the leadership style they had adopted during this process. Information about the leadership style of the Principal was also gleaned from other school stakeholders.

The first section of the report presents a discussion relating to educational leadership and then a statement about what constitutes Inquiry Learning

The second section provides a case study of each of the schools visited. This is presented in a narrative format, explaining each school’s journey and an overview of the leadership style and inquiry model that emerged throughout that school’s journey.

The final section of the report presents the conclusions and implications for New Zealand schools.

## METHODOLOGY

**The sabbatical application requires the applicant to follow an Inquiry based research path.**

### **Big Question**

How do exemplary Principals manage and sustain change in order to enhance student learning outcomes?

### **Underlying Questions**

What are the characteristics/management styles of exemplary Principals, including Principals who manage and sustain change?

What are the characteristics of Principals who implement and sustain an Inquiry Learning approach?

What Inquiry Learning model results in positive learning outcomes for students?

What process does this Inquiry Learning model follow?

### **Inquiry Process Relating to this Research Topic**

#### Immersion

Background reading and research

#### Wonderings/Focus

Prepare big question and sub questions. Rework questions if necessary after readings, reflections and discussions with colleagues.

#### Discovery

Talking to experts, administer questionnaire, observations, conversations with colleagues, further readings.

Visit four schools in South Australia who have Inquiry Learning as a basis to the delivery of the curriculum and who have Principals who have introduced this model. These school have been recommended by researchers at Flinders University Adelaide, who themselves have undertaken research into the effectiveness of the Inquiry Learning model.

Administer questionnaire seeking information relating to the leadership style, how change was instigated and how it is sustained. Seek information relating to the Inquiry Learning model – how was it introduced. What does this model look like?

Organising and Recording

Making sense of the new knowledge. Collating information gleaned from the school visited.

Evaluation/So What?

Implications for Principals, communities, schools and educational programmes in New Zealand. How does this research support the New Zealand School Strategy 2005 – 2010?

Presenting

Report writing

**Case Studies**

School A

Narrative

School B

Narrative

School C

Narrative

School D

Narrative

# EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

## Why is the study of Leadership important?

Effective leadership though difficult to define is indeed necessary for the changing environment of our school settings. The effects of poor leadership are easy to see and if we do not continue to investigate effective styles the progress of our schools in this changing world and the continued development of successful learning outcomes for the diverse range of students found in New Zealand schools will not occur..

Leithwood and Riehl (2003 January) state that major findings from research show that quality school leadership is important for the following reasons:

- a) Leadership has significant effect on student learning, second only to the effects of quality curriculum and teachers instruction.
- b) Leaders influence student learning by helping to promote vision and goals and by ensuring that resources and processes are in place to support teachers.
- c) Principals and other teacher leaders can help the wider school community to understand the changes that are needed to strengthen teaching and learning.
- d) Effective leaders enable the school to function as a professional learning community to support and sustain the performance of all key workers.
- e) Educational improvement usually requires individuals to make personal changes to the way they have undertaken things in the past. An effective principal shows respect for staff and concern about their feelings.
- f) Effective leaders realise the importance of synergy across the school and set examples for staff and others to follow that are in line with the school values and goals.
- g) Effective leaders assess how well the school is performing, ask critical and constructive questions, emphasize the use of systematic evidence and encourage careful monitoring of pupils progress.

**“Significant change only occurs when it is driven from the top.”**

**‘There is no point in going forward unless the CEO is on board.’**

**“Nothing will happen without top management buy-in.”**

Peter Senge in his article on *The Leadership of Profound Change (SPK INK 2000, #1)* asks how often these ‘hoary truisms’ have been heard. It is now a common understanding among many organisations, not only educational settings that the evidence for top management to change organisations is ‘thin at best’.

In the past, educational leadership was based on hierarchical authority or the ‘hero-leader’ where leaders possessed the capability for directing other to make changes and the charisma and visions to influence others.

However we are now aware that the standard practice of the past has become less than successful and that if a new hero-leader is appointed the improvements do not last. People cling to habitual ways of doing things. New ideas do not spring forth from people at the front line because they are too intimidated to stick their necks out. (Senge 2000)

Obviously this situation needs to change and in recent times with changing and challenging situations facing schools the practices of the past are now found to be inadequate.

Leadership styles now talk about collaborative practices where not only is there an emphasis on structural change but also on changes within the culture of the school. 'Reculturing' of a school precedes successful restructuring rather than vice versa. (Fullan, in Stewart, Thinking about Principalship).

The early 1980's saw the introduction of 'instructional' leadership, as a collaborative practice. Blasé and Blasé (2002) conducted an extensive study on this leadership style. They identified two major themes in strategies that were used frequently by Principals adopting the instructional approach.

1. **Talking with Teachers to promote reflection.** The effective principal encouraged teachers to critically reflect on their learning and professional practice. This dialogue would be initiated in the following ways:-
  - a) The principal would make suggestions to teachers both formally and informally
  - b) The principal became a 'critical friend', providing praise and responding to concerns
  - c) The principal would model teaching techniques and the forms of modelling were 'viewed as impressive examples of instructional leadership.'
  - d) The instructional principals often used the Inquiry approach with teachers, asking questions about instructional matters.
  - e) The principal would distribute praise to teachers focussing on specific teaching acts.
2. **Promoting professional growth.** Effective instructional leaders used six strategies to promote professional development amongst teachers.
  - a) The principal helped teachers to stay informed about current trends and issues. They provided staff development opportunities that addressed current needs of staff.
  - b) The principal would encourage teamwork and provide time for sharing and class observations.
  - c) The principal would encourage peer coaching and peer observations.
  - d) The principal would encourage staff to become flexible in their teaching strategies and develop the necessary resources so that teachers could apply a number of diverse approaches to teaching and learning.
  - e) The principal would focus on the individual need of the staff member and create a climate of 'lifelong learning'.
  - f) The principal would employ action research as a means for conducting staff development.

It is obvious from the above list that given today's school the principal would have to indeed be super 'hero-like' to be able to not only take on the necessary support and guidance of each individual staff member but to also carry out the necessary increased administrative tasks demanded of them.



Richard DuFour (2002), says that the idea of the 'instructional leader' is flawed. He suggests that the 'wrong questions' were being asked by principals taking on this leadership style. He states that principals were asking:

“What are the teachers teaching?” and “How can I help them to teach more effectively?”

Dufour suggests that principals need to be asking:

“To what extent are the students learning?” and  
“What steps can I take to give both students and teachers the additional time and support they need to improve learning?”

It is believed that through this approach principals attend to structural and cultural changes while they help teachers to improve their teaching through team work that is focussing on student achievement outcomes.

The instructional leadership model obviously focussed on the 'hero-like' trait and required the leader to be not only the expert but to have all the power and authority. The change in work load for principals after the introduction in 1989 of *Tomorrow's Schools* saw a move away from this particular leadership style, to one of a more collaborative approach.

A number of educational leaders in the early 1990's developed the idea of "Transformational Leadership", as a collaborative approach. (Apted & Macnee, 2004) The Principal works to create 'climates and systems', not leading from the top but encouraging a working environment that provides leadership opportunities for all staff, including those who have been appointed in more formal leadership roles. Sergiovanni, (1991), (in Stewart, Thinking about Principals), states that "the school as a community would value transformational associations where the group as a whole was committed to an ideal." Stewart also quotes Sergiovanni in supporting transformational culture as opposed to an instructional culture. Sergiovanni states that in an instructional culture, "what gets rewarded gets done", while in a transformational cultures "what is rewarding gets done".

Harris and Chapman( 2002 June) suggest that "the demands placed on leaders requires them to have a broad range of leadership approaches". They go on to state that in their study highly creative approaches to tackling the complex demands of the task were developed. The 'overarching message was one of the head building the community of the school in its widest sense, i.e. through developing and involving others'.

Distributional leadership (developing and involving others) as a style of leadership, is at present growing amongst leaders as a model that supports the process of change within schools and the community. Bennett,Wise, Woods and Harvey (2003) suggest that distributed leadership is not something 'done' by an individual to others but it is when group members have the opportunity to 'pool' their expertise. It is also not limited to a small number of people with formal senior roles and should involve other members of the school community other than teaching staff. "Drawing many people into the potential leadership group makes it possible for initiatives to be developed

from all other members of the organisation, and then adopted, adapted and improved by others in a culture of support and trust.”

This style of leadership plays an important role in the development of learning communities.

The principal adopting a distributional leadership style and developing a learning community does not abdicate his or her role nor do they impose goals on followers.

Harris and Chapman (2002 June) support the principle of learning communities. The key for a principal establishing a learning community is the belief that others are the key to change. Learning communities that bring about change do not see improvement in the schools setting by being dependent upon individual or singular leadership practices.

Blasé and Blasé (2002) confirm the findings of their study that shared decision-making rather than ‘directives and criticism’ as well as teachers working together as ‘communities of learners’ had positive effects on teachers, teaching and schools.

Learning Communities are also supported by Stewart. He says that when staff are encouraged to ‘make overt’ the dominant values and beliefs of a school, change and school renewal is likely to be successful. In this community Stewart states that people will fulfil a multiple of roles but all will have a right to be heard. “All will have a measure of control and responsibilities for their own actions and will have a commitment to the health and well-being of the whole community.” It is interesting to note that Harvard’s Chris Argyris (in Senge 2002) says that the feedback process sometimes applied to management subtly reinforces the view that management is the source of problems and only management has the power to fix them. “employee surveys, focus groups and ‘360 feedback’ can give people anonymous ways to ‘tell management what is wrong’ without assuming any responsibility for improving matters.”

Stewart in his article “Thinking about Principalship” stated that Sebring et al listed five features which created a professional community for teachers

- regular opportunities to discuss teaching practices (reflection)
- observation of colleagues and the joint solving of problems
- collaborative work
- a culture of shared values and beliefs rather than one based on rules and requirements
- student learning being the main focus of attention

It is my belief that the attributes required of a distributional principal, who is fostering a learning community, should be the attributes found in other leaders in the school, not just the formally appointed leaders but teacher leaders who can help other teachers to embrace goals, to understand that changes are needed to strengthen teaching and learning and that school wide vision and goals will bring about improvement for all. A principal should cultivate leaders at many levels and ensure leadership succession takes place.

## So What does an Effective Leader who is managing Change ‘Look Like’?

Louise Stoll in her article, “Enhancing internal capacity: leadership for learning,” summarises it well.

1. Don’t lose sight of your learning vision – all must learn.

The vision must involve all within the community. It must be focussed on the premise that everyone pupils, teachers, leaders and the school as an organisation must learn. There must be no excuses – high expectations for all.

2. Engage hearts as well as minds: create the right emotional learning climate

Stoll states that, “Leaders must devote time and energy to building trust and openness between staff, pupils and the community, recognising and celebrating teachers’ as well as pupils’ successes, dealing with power conflicts, and looking out for the funny side of things.”

3. Become learning experts: build an inclusive learning community

Structural change without change in the ways teachers work with pupils brings about little real change. Principals need to support teachers in order to develop a more detailed understanding of the process of learning:

- a) that learners do not all learn in the same way
- b) that there is a need to know what effective learning looks like
- c) that learning takes place in different locations ( school home, wider social environment)

Time and opportunities for collaboration and other supportive social and structural conditions should be put in place. Involving staff in determining what can best meet their needs as well as those of the school would bring about an inclusive learning community.

4. Practise organisational learning

- a) develop the notion of ‘continuous improvement’. Examine and adapt existing cultural norms.
- b) collect, analyse and use a range of hard and soft data to monitor and evaluate the process, progress and outcomes of the improvement efforts
- c) underpin the approach to learning with reflective self-analysis and “inquiry-mindedness”.
- d) engage in systems thinking – look for interrelationships, connections and synergy

Michael Fullan (2002) also sees the need for leaders to not only change the learning culture of the school but also of the “teaching profession itself”.

Fullen suggests that there are five areas that a “Cultural Change Principal” needs to focus on. We see similarities to the ideas Louise Stoll presented. Stoll and Fullen also provide us with close links to the ideas found within the Ministry of Education’s Schooling Strategy.

- 1) Moral Purpose  
Effective Principals of change are focussed on closing the gap between high performing and lower performing students. They have high expectations for all students and realise that change takes place when student learning is carefully monitored.
- 2) Understanding Change  
Effective Principals help others to gather a collective vision, they do not focus on what they believe to be the most innovative way. They understand that the road to change is an exceedingly bumpy one and that it is important to not only listen to the resisters and find a way to 'address those concerns', but also to help those people cope with the change.
- 3) Improving Relationships  
Effective Principals build relationships with "diverse people and groups – especially with people who think differently." The employment of emotional intelligence is seen to be pivotal to ensuring that relationships between different groups within ones community find common goals and a common purpose.
- 4) Knowledge Creation and Sharing  
Effective Principals understand that the promotion of knowledge – "giving as well as seeking", takes place when communities work together. The development of learning communities is important to assist the sharing of knowledge and "continual growth for all."
- 5) Coherence Making  
Effective Principals do not take on too many projects at once, nor do they totally focus on the external agent or innovator for change within their organisation. A principal focussed on student learning as well as keeping abreast with best practice and aligning these within their school practices will meet with greater success when managing change.

## INQUIRY LEARNING

Independent study, research learning, action learning, individual study, contract learning, negotiated curriculum are all names that have been applied to aspects of Inquiry Learning. Over the last few years the name “Inquiry Learning” has come to mean much more than any of the titles used above. It is now considered to be a ‘legitimate’ pedagogical method for assisting students to learn.

Education is not about the assimilating of facts. The curriculum changes that have taken place over the last decade have emphasised process – the process of learning to learn, learning to read, to write, ask questions, make decisions and to use information. Gawith, (1987).

Inquiry learning is not about gathering new knowledge, presenting it to an audience in the form of a power point and adding on some new ‘social action’. It is very much a managed process, particularly at the early stage with very young children. What is fundamentally the difference from the old style ‘project’ format is that at each stage the learner concentrates on specific skills and is carefully supported or ‘scaffolded’ through each step of the process.

Coil (1997) suggests three essential key areas for successful teaching and learning for the 21st century. These are flexibility, choices and planning. These key ideas she says move away from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Industrial Age mode of everyone learning and doing the same thing at the same time, to the Information Age model of individualised life-long learning.

The inquiry model enables students to, individualise learning, develop higher order thinking and to enhance critical and creative thought. It allows for differences in learning styles, pace and rate of learning, time needed to complete a task, student interest and student ability. The element of choice is an important aspect of the Inquiry Learning model. Choices for students come in a variety of formats. The curriculum can be varied (element of choice of topic within a curriculum area) the activities, research methods, resources and how the study will be presented are all elements that can be varied by the student. The element of choice should not be that vast that it causes confusion and results in the student learning nothing. The teacher must plan and structure the curriculum so that appropriate learning outcomes are reached.

The planned use of a learning path or the use of certain tools to assist the learner are all part of the Inquiry model. The student is not abandoned throughout the process but carefully guided by the teacher with careful planning and the introduction of certain tools and structures to support the learning.

Inquiry Learning requires the learner to become information literate not only with library skills but also through the use of information technology. It is interesting to note a number of ‘lead teachers’ with ICT contracts and Inquiry Learning models, state that there has been considerable move away from technical resourcing to a focus on teaching and learning. Colin Davidson, (2005) states that “A common thread across many schools was that increasing hardware resourcing was not the resolution

to addressing the paradigm shifts required in pedagogy – indeed in most classrooms where inquiry learning was being implemented, computers were not heavily represented as critical resources.”

An Inquiry model usually takes the following form. However a variety of formats are available and I believe the process is continually being revised by teachers working with this model.

a) Immersion in the selected topic.

Students become ‘experts’ about the topic. They acquire knowledge of the topic that will cover the present, past and future.

b) Development of Questions

Students define a set of questions or areas of interest, prompting deeper understanding and interest in the topic. High level questions (Bloom’s Taxonomy), or questions keys (Lane Clark) form the basis of the inquiry. These questions are usually relevant to the student’s lives now or in the future. High quality questions are essential if the topic is to be meaningful and not result in wasted time meandering around the topic.

c) Hypothesis

Students record what they think the answer is now, based on the knowledge they have gleaned from their initial immersion. Tracking of changes or adaptations to this hypothesis throughout the research topic should also be noted. This is an important step to help the student ‘stay on track’ and to continually reflect and evaluate the process ensuring relevant information is being gathered.

d) Gathering Information

The student gathers print and non print resources and references to answer the question and extend comprehension of the selected topic. At this stage informational literacy skills must be taught so that the students can access, recognise and evaluate relevant information.

The skills to be taught need to cover:-

**Thinking Skills** e.g. critical, creative and problem solving

**Research Skills** e.g. Taking notes, use of the internet, cite references

**Learning-to-Learn Skills** e.g. making plans, establishing time limits, when to ask for assistance, keeping track of progress.

e) Findings

The student gathers and organises information to summarise and order the findings. This would include sifting, sorting and synthesizing the information.

f) Reporting

The student presents the findings in a cogent manner, checking that all relevant information is included in the answer.

g) Social Action

The student looks at the question in the light of their new knowledge and understanding and thinks critically about a new insight and action they may be able to take. This could include writing letter to an MP, making signs or advertisements round the school or district, holding a fund raising event etc.

It is important to note that every piece of research does not have to contain this aspect of the process. Thinking and discussing the topic with other 'experts' and bringing about a change in ones thinking is also highly desirable. The joy of learning for learning's sake must not be forgotten.

h) Evaluation

Assessing the performance and learning related to the study.

There is little information available to educational leaders on the success or otherwise of inquiry learning. However the research undertaken by Van Deur and Murray-Harvey (2005), in a number of South Australian schools is particularly interesting and relevant.

Their study proceeded to look at how schools implemented an inquiry-based curriculum and how schools effectively support students' development as self-directed learners. Using an inventory they were able to categorise six South Australian primary schools as providing a low, moderate or high level of support for inquiry – low, moderate or high inquiry schools.

They suggest that self-directed learning is developed through internal and external influences. Internal influences comprise personal characteristics such as attitude initiative, effort, persistence, planning checking and reflecting. External influences include the context that directs an inquiry e.g. the curriculum, teacher, classroom and access to ICT equipment and other resources.

Positive motivation and the process of self-efficacy are also indicators of how successfully a student will carry out an inquiry task. Van Deur and Murray-Harvey go on to explain, "that although motivation is recognised as a characteristic of a student, it is increasingly being recognised as being dependent on external influences such as the way classrooms are organised" (Pintrich and De Groot, 1990). Within schools and classrooms students interact with their peers and teachers, and these interactions have a major influence on students' motivation."

This statement in itself would be worthy of further research, particularly when we are aware of so many students who are underachieving in our present school settings, and whom teachers feel lack that personal motivation. We so often hear of children being 'bored' and that the problem belongs to them. This current research would indicate otherwise.

The inquiry task they state has an important effect on self directed learning, as well as providing the incentive to be self-directed. They also acknowledge that inquiry requires high order thinking skills such as creative and critical thinking.

They also see that “school level factors” have an influence on students’ learning, and this is seen as being particularly important when considering inquiry learning. They cite Sternberg, Rhine and Rutter and Maughan as all describing contextual “school level factors”, such as, “school organisation, group management in the classroom, the pedagogic qualities of the teacher, nature of classroom tasks, the teachers role and the social culture of the classroom”, as being important aspect influencing learning outcomes for students undertaking inquiry learning.

Van Deur and Murray-Harvey suggest that explicit teaching about self directed learning is vital so that skills relating to this process are not left to chance. It is important to ensure the tasks are provided in easy steps, learning how to approach the tasks, clear teacher modelling and revisiting and reflecting on previously taught skills. We are well aware however that the rate and pace of delivery in terms of teaching this process will not be the same for all students. Research clearly states that Gifted and Talented students need to have a differentiated rate and pace of programme delivery and there would be very little, if any repetition.

Their research showed that “the inquiry nature of a school had an influence on students’ knowledge and development of self-directed learning following explicit teaching.” Students attending a school that was a high inquiry school were more engaged with their learning than those in the low and moderate inquiry schools. Students from a ‘high inquiry school’ had a higher mean frequency of responses in activities classified as higher order thinking, while students in the low inquiry schools had the lowest means for the higher order thinking skills.

“This study indicated that for primary students in general there is value in assessing and teaching about self-directed learning.”



## **CASE STUDY**

### **School A**

#### **Inquiry Learning**

This school had been a trial school for a Gifted and Talented programme in the 1990's. As an outcome of that programme the Principal noted the need for the introduction of a school-wide initiative for inquiry learning. The Principal believed that it was a valuable 'process to assist higher order thinking skills and for pupils not necessarily reaching their potential'. He stated that it was an opportunity for students to go deeper into their prescribed areas of study'. He felt that at this point in time they were reinvigorating the inquiry learning pedagogical model and that it was timely for it to be revisited.

This particular school is set in a high socio economic area and the school culture is such that it requires the leadership team and principal to 'read'; the community quite carefully. The conservative nature of the community has meant that the process of change and the implementation of the inquiry learning programme needed to be introduced quite slowly. The principal stated that, 'the children share the same characteristics as the parents' – they are not risk-takers and that change needs to be managed slowly and sensitively. Consultation with the community takes place frequently as well as with all staff members. If a decision about the way forward for the school contradicts the majority culture of the community, then the principal believes there would be a problem. If parents perceive a discrepancy between their values and the schools, the opinion of the principal was that parents would take their children away from the school and enrol in the local private schools. The staff is predominately made up of teachers who have been teaching at the school for some considerable time and have taught for on average 12 years. A number of staff members also live within the district. Staff members are however encouraged to take risks with pedagogy.

He stated that a change of culture in terms of implementing inquiry learning across the school – at all levels and for all children, has not yet taken place, but his view is the approach is one that is necessary for the future learning of the children at this school and for the future development of the wider school culture. He also claimed that where independent learning has taken place, some really deep problem solving has been evident. This was evidenced in a study on environmental sustainability. It is important to share these positive outcomes with the community for further changes to be made in terms of school culture. The adoption of an inquiry based model is at present dependent upon teacher nomination.

The principal believes that in order for the model to be effective it must be part of the culture of the school and imbedded in all that they do. An inquiry learning model is at present being used for school wide policy and procedure review. Staff members are therefore being exposed to a model while participating in school-wide reviews. The questions and review process are therefore relevant and meaningful to staff and this so obviously forms a way for the model to be part of the school culture. The school has worked with an internationally recognised educational strategic consultant, who has

assisted them to set out the journey of change and to demonstrate the need for the inquiry process to be implicit in all that they do.

A teaching and learning co-ordinator has been appointed and has for the last twelve months taken a lead in developing Inquiry Learning across the school. The co-ordinator offers flexible professional development sessions with staff on how to implement Inquiry Learning programmes. Staff members elect to participate either in groups or in the form of one to one sessions. This professional development has in some instances been tied to literacy and numeracy development, thus providing quite a formal structure to the learning process. The Principal supports the co-ordinator to implement the long term vision for the school, providing guidance and resources to enable the co-ordinator to encourage staff to implement an Inquiry Learning model. The principal believes that at this point in time a number of staff are well outside their comfort zone, but with a long term view of professional development and positive support provided to the staff, change will take place.

### **Style of Leadership**

The principal believed in a shared leadership approach and described his style as situational. 'It is a bit of everything, what suits the outcomes you want'. He wants an open style of leadership that is not bureaucratic. He strongly believes in recognising people's skills and in honesty in the performance management system. He frequently talks about a very collaborative leadership style, with a strong sense of faith and trust in the people he is working with.

The performance management system both for himself and the teachers is based on a 360 degree model. Staff members elect to present themselves for the 360degree with students. This is seen as non-threatening as the staff themselves have opted into it and will hopefully lead to more staff members 'buying' into this process. The principal meets with a group of students from the staff member's class. It is made quite clear to the students that they must depersonalise their comments. The principal also receives feed back once a year from the staff about his leadership style. They use an outside consultant to support this process. This is the formal aspect of the appraisal process. Ongoing feedback in more informal ways is sought throughout the year. This is through leadership team meetings and steering group meetings, thus the formal aspect of appraisal should only confirm the leadership style being presented.

The leadership team comprises two principals and two deputy principals.

A steering committee has also been formed, which occasionally involves students in the decision making/consultation process. The steering committee would include of senior staff members and management who had expertise in determining the best process for the issues that needed to be taken forward.

Decisions relating to ICT development are conducted in a different manner. The process here is much 'flatter'. Staff members, both administration and teaching staff are released when there is need to make school-wide decision about ICT. Decisions are then taken back to senior management. The principal believes that the process of

ownership in the decision making process will bring about change in the use of ICT tools in the classroom and in the integration of ICT in the curriculum.

## **CASE STUDY**

### **School B**

#### **Inquiry Learning**

When the principal was appointed to the school he inherited not only a non cohesive teaching team but also a non cohesive pedagogical philosophy. Staff members had been dabbling with constructive teaching philosophies but this was certainly not part of the school culture. The principal knew that in order to bring about cohesion across the school, they would need to develop school-wide philosophies and that this would require time, commitment and energy from all members of the staff. The positive aspect of this journey was that staff wanted to be cohesive and wanted to be part of the decision making not only in terms of protocols and procedures but also with the pedagogical development.

The principal was provided with the opportunity to visit some schools in Queensland. Here he saw in operation the 'Productive Pedagogies' approach and felt that this seemed worthwhile as it was receiving huge support in Queensland and that it 'fitted' with his personal philosophy of education.

The aim of Productive Pedagogies is 'To develop an understanding of the learning design process for a future orientated curriculum'. It ensures discipline rigour and contexts for learning that are connected to the wide world. Students are engaged in disciplined inquiry and are encouraged to see that learning has value and relevance beyond the school. They are taken from 'just in case learning' to 'just in time learning'. The productive pedagogies approach follows a classic inquiry model:

- a) Step 1 – Selecting a topic
- b) Step 2 – Identifying deep understandings
- c) Step 3 – Develop significant questions
- d) Step 4 – Determine how students are going to demonstrate their learning and understanding (end products)
- e) Step 5 – Identify deep knowledge required for task
- f) Step 6 – Identify skills and knowledge required for the learning process.
- g) Step 7 – Sequence the learning experience
- h) Step 8 – Develop individual lessons/activities

The principal knew that the introduction and full implementation of this model would take a number of years and that it was important to work through this process slowly and carefully to ensure eventual 'buy-in' by all of the staff.

The principal felt that in order to introduce this model across the whole school that a focus on the building of positive relationships, including the development of trust of each other was essential.

In the first year he knew that this needed to be started in small ways with 'low-risk' topics – small things that would involve all in the decision making process and that were not too difficult in terms of outcomes.

In the second year they looked at assessment data and wanted to focus on parts of the curriculum that needed to improve. Numeracy became the focus for professional development and this was aligned with the productive pedagogy development.

At the beginning of the second year they closed the school for a day and participated in a full staff development programme relating to this topic. They employed an expert in this field from Queensland who provided a very clear framework for the model and how to go about implementing it in relation to numeracy.

The approach was at first quite informal. Staff members were encouraged to “have a crack at using a question”. A co-ordinator was appointed to support staff with lesson plans and at performance management meetings staff were provided with time to reflect on how it was going and report accordingly.

A great deal of team planning and sharing also took place. Full staff meetings with teams sharing their ideas and encouraging staff to question and discuss the process were common.

At the end of the second year the data collected at the beginning of the numeracy development was analyzed against the end of year data. The staff were most encouraged with the results, believing that the intervention of the inquiry model had made a difference. Students had worked on projects in meaningful contexts and had undertaken units of work that were of strong interest to them. This was indeed a unique way of approaching Inquiry Learning. Mathematics is not the usual curriculum vehicle used to introduce Inquiry Learning – the Social Sciences being the most common approach.

It is also important to note that in the second year high quality training and development was provided to new staff. Quality induction programmes are seen as paramount for the sustainability of such programmes. This programme not only supported the new staff but served as a reflection and ‘expert’ time for staff who had already been on the project. The school also invited other schools to participate in the professional development. The outcomes were positive for all teachers and the principal was delighted with a profit being made for his school!

The third year saw the development move deeper into the curriculum. This was through the commitment and energy of the staff. The principal felt that now the staff had begun to drive the process themselves, while he acted as the facilitator and provided the resources. “The ownership of the process now belonged to the staff”.

The co-ordinator was much more widely available to help with co-operative planning in teams and with individuals. The principal provided a budget that ensured release time for staff to work with the coordinator as well as a budget for resources (especially for numeracy).

The learning process (productive pedagogies) is now displayed in all classrooms and is seen in the planning and implementation of the curriculum across the school. The principal believes the success of the programme relates to the journey they have taken together – that it has been “an adventure in learning for all of us” with “no right or wrong end point”, but a “sharing of the process”.

## **Leadership style**

The principal believes in an open door supportive leadership style, to maximise the strengths of individual staff members. He stated that he is a 'gentle encourager', with staff being able to come into his office to discuss concerns, ideas or to clarify teaching and learning philosophies. He also felt it was important to know when to trust staff and when to leave them to work through the new development and not interfere with the process. He has strongly involved the full community in the visionary process - teaching staff and parents.

The principal spends considerable time consulting with the staff. Communication with all stakeholders takes place before important decisions are made. He stated that it was important to listen to all staff and to 'read' the level of trust that they are feeling about the process. He clearly informs the staff of the need for the best person for the position. Appropriate budgeting and planning is also important for the way forward. Staff in turn feel empowered and very much apart of the vision of the school.

He stated how important it was to convince the community that this is a high quality school with high quality programmes. The school is in a high socio economic area with a number of independent schools, in the same district. The school roll is at present growing.

The co-ordinator described his style as a "good practitioner, a team worker, and innovator". He himself believes that he is astute at working systems to his advantage, particularly the appointment of staff that would best suit the schools climate and culture. He noted how important it was to employ the 'right' staff. The need to spend considerable time and energy in the appointment process was seen to be particularly critical, especially the accuracy and verification of references. It is pivotal if one is to take on a journey of change that newly appointed staff members are honest, open and willing to share the journey with the rest of the school. A personal educational philosophy that is not 'in tune' with the schools direction could destroy much of the positive work that has already taken place.

He opines that his leadership style included the provision of clear structures, clear policies and protocols. 'The way things are done at this school must be transparent and clear to all. He also stated that it was important for staff to take risks, that "one can not teach children to risk take if the teacher can't".

## **CASE STUDY**

### **School C**

#### **Inquiry Learning**

This school has made fundamental changes to the way a school is organised and the curricula delivered. In this school, instead of the traditional classroom, there are 'learning areas', catering to children's different learning styles. The traditional class organisation has been replaced with learning teams, learning groups and independent learners, working on their own.

This programme has been developed over a number of years and was first initiated with 'volunteers' i.e. teaching staff who would like to trial a different approach. The deputy principal stated that the principal was the 'absolute driving force and was incredibly inspirational.' The principal had a strong background in research and based the programme on her observation that traditional learning programmes at the school 'were not meeting the needs of her community of learners'.

The journey started nearly seven years ago, with the support of a few staff and a number of parents. It was trialled with about 70 students in the Year 3 – 7 area. The programme was at first limited to a small part of the day and over the years has developed into all areas of the school and for the full day

All students develop individual learning plans and monitor their progress against the outcomes of the South Australian Curriculum. Students are encouraged to identify their own learning needs and to make decisions about how they will meet those needs. The inquiry framework of, What do I know, What do I need to or want to know and How will I go about structuring my learning takes place. There is ongoing assessment of progress and teachers assist individual children to plot their learning pathways and to make personal choices of what their learning will look like.

The school has moved from a 'teacher constructs – teacher chooses, model to a student constructs, students chooses outcome.

The traditional method of working in schools, with one cell one teacher, is not apparent at this school. Students interact with many adults and other children and are provided with assistance from different people for different aspects of their learning.

The deputy principal stated that students engage in setting their own targets, devising their own learning plans and goals and choosing from a variety of ways to learn'.

The development of programmes at this school has a strong foundation in educational research. It is based on research that concludes that learning is improved when it :

1. identifies and builds on what individuals already know and can do
2. promotes deep understandings of concepts
3. enables learners to track their own progress and make decisions about their future learning pathways.

The learning model present at this school ensures that learners are coming from a personalised base. That not all children will learn in the same way, at the same time and on the same topic.

## **Leadership Style**

The deputy principal stated that the principal had a very intuitive style of leadership, “she got to know everyone very well – she, knew my ‘buttons’ and was sensitive to individual needs.” Senior staff interviewed felt that she knew how important it was to work at developing positive professional relationships and put a number of systems in place in order to not lose sight of this need.

The staff appointed a grievance officer, who brought any issue out in the open so that the staff could discuss it at full staff meetings. She organised regular staff to staff feedback and conducted a number of staff ‘bonding’ trips.

The deputy principal described the principal as a collaborative leader, developing a team to support the new organisation she wanted to introduce. The deputy principal also stated that her style of leadership was one of support, encouragement and someone who provided a great deal of professional development to support the changes being made. It was important that not only the structure of the learning day was understood but the underlying philosophy of the programme. The principal’s style was also one of sharing ideas and ‘learning together’, though she had a clear idea of where she wanted the school to go.

The senior management team also stated that if staff (who had been placed at the school) were not comfortable with this particular philosophy being developed at the school, the principal would provide support and guidance to help them find a setting more suitable to their needs. The principal was very aware that the philosophy being introduced was not suited to all personal professional beliefs.

An important factor in this particular leadership style is the strong emphasis on including the parent community as a fundamental part of the learning journey. *Tom Donahoe 1. (phi Delta Kappan, Dec 1993v75 p298(8) states that every member of the administrative, teaching and classified staff as well as some parents – must have an active role in the formal organization’* if change within schools is to be successful.

The chairperson of the Governing Council described the principal as ‘very consultative’. Major topics where a decision would need to be made would be indicated prior to a meeting. This was to ensure that everyone was clear about the idea and that they had received sufficient information on the topic to be discussed. The decision making process was clear and transparent. Consensus was usually sought and though, ‘not everyone has the same opinion, time would be spent on working it out and valuing other peoples opinions.’ The chairperson also described the principal as being visible, she ‘was out there, getting to know the parents and the students and offering people as many opportunities as possible to ask questions’.



## **CASE STUDY**

### **School D**

#### **Inquiry Learning**

This small school has for a number of years developed 'personal learning plans' for their students. The philosophy of the school is based on 'constructivism', which holds that students are active in learning and construct their own way of gathering knowledge, rather than being passive vessels to be filled. The school, as seen in one other model, is not divided into the traditional teaching cell but into learning areas. The learning areas related to the children's chronological age and their level of learning need. The students are given ownership of their learning and teachers are responsible for ensuring depth, breadth and rigour in their personal learning.

Personal timetables are completed each day. A set time is allocated four days a week for skills in maths and language (which included a silent sustained writing session). It is interesting to note that these two core curriculum areas have a strong foundational component and that though there is some element of 'choice' coverage of the basic skills are tracked carefully. This model deviates from the truly integrated or what is known as sometimes the 'negotiated curriculum' approach. I believe this is the strength of this particular schools programme. Timetables also included scheduled time for reading, reflection, sketching, novel reading, computer groups and fitness. A circle meeting time is also scheduled so that classes can receive basic organisational notices. Sports groups, Indonesian, choir and concert band were also options.

When undertaking an area of study students could select the level they wished to attain and meet the success criteria presented. Students selected from, Novice, Learner, Advanced Learner and User/Expert. Students can carefully gauge their level of learning and their level of success.

Junior classes are provided with the basic tools and much of the inquiry learning is modelled and provided in whole class lessons, and small groups.

As this school has been involved in inquiry learning for approximately five years, the students in the senior school (who have moved through the school) were well equipped to 'manage' their own learning within the topics of their choice.

#### **Leadership style**

The principal stated that she had a strong personal belief in Inquiry Learning through her own research and her many years of observing how children learn. She stated that it was in her 'leadership' role that she had a responsibility to challenge educational thinking of her staff, but to also at the same time provide support. She stated that it required patience to introduce this model and that it was a very gradual process. Initially two staff left as they could not adapt to the model being presented and one former staff member wanted 'to boss' the children rather than provide them with a constructivist learning setting. The principal stated that she encouraged the staff to have "a little bit of hands on ( in terms of developing learning settings) and a lot of

hands off'. The principal said that she was "not a strategic planner", but was a flexible leader who worked with her staff and community to judge the pace of change. She noted that the staff had the right to have opinions and that there was "no need to lead by authority". She felt it was important to adopt a 'deflect and defuse' approach and that it was necessary for her to model that approach. Decisions are made collectively with the staff. A great deal of discussion takes place and there is time for reflective thinkers. There are occasions when decisions are deferred, so that the input from reflective thinkers can be taken into consideration. The principal encourages innovation and will provide the necessary resources and support for ideas that are presented to her.

## CONCLUSIONS

In summary, the study I have undertaken has provided anecdotal information that shows that the four schools discussed in the narrative above believe that inquiry learning brings about positive results for students. This opinion results from the experiences, changes and improvements experienced in these schools over time. Data that the schools had gathered particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy clearly showed that the intervention of Inquiry Learning had made a difference. Interviews with students showed that positive attitudinal change to learning took place once they had mastered the Inquiry Learning process. . The Inquiry Learning model, they stated allowed for an increased independence in students learning and control over their learning.

Michael Fullen's interview with Dennis Sparks (2003) discusses the need not only for 'change in the culture of schools' but also in the 'culture of teaching.' I believe that this change would be significantly assisted by the adoption of the inquiry model. Fullen talks about 'information becoming knowledge through a social process, and knowledge becoming wisdom through sustained interaction.' It is my strong belief that students once given the necessary tools and skills to not only manage their learning but to seek for knowledge and apply their learning would be moving towards this level of wisdom.

## IMPLICATIONS

1. Inquiry Learning is seen to be effective for all students and not simply gifted and talented students for whom it was first proposed. The skills it provides are important for all students and important to their on going life long learning.
2. All Inquiry Learning models observed had implicit in them the core components of Inquiry learning. The children have a choice of topic, but they also develop new skills, tools and attitudes that permit them to seek resolutions to questions and issues while constructing new knowledge and moving toward managing their own learning. It was noted that the skills and tools introduced are a strong part of the process and are carefully scaffolded for the student by their teacher. The children are not 'abandoned' during this process.
3. All case studies emphasised the importance of understanding the community and its aspirations. This is necessary if the community is to accept new educational directions and to be involved in the process and supportive of it.
4. An important concept that was seen in all case studies was the importance of developing an inclusive learning community. This included developing the vision and goals for the school together. All stakeholders in the community, e.g. parents/caregivers, staff and pupils were involved in this learning community. The learning communities observed were communities where teachers were working to improve their teaching practices rather than working together to reinforce traditional practices.
5. Distributive leadership or ensuring the sustainability of the project was seen to be important. Often there was a lead teacher or a team of teachers. The Principal though articulating the wider vision was not always driving the change. The micro management of the change process had been delegated to others. These leaders in turn held many of the skills and attitudes required of a 'change manager'.
6. All Principals and change leaders interviewed talked about the importance of building positive relationships – how the building of a culture of trust and openness was pivotal to their school culture. This took place well before they began introducing pedagogical changes.
7. The success of the programmes introduced into the study schools is known through not only data but also anecdotal information. This information is not only from students but also from parents and caregivers. Success of programmes was also evident in their rates of attendance and noted increase in roll numbers.
8. Leaders in the study schools managed the change process slowly. They started small and usually with volunteer staff members and small groups of students.

9. Leaders in the school ensure that student learning outcomes were the focus of the school. They wanted to gather a variety of data to monitor and evaluate the process and progress. This information is used to inform future teaching and learning programmes.

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